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Psalm 77

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Psalm 77— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the [General Introduction](#) as well as the Introduction to [Book I](#) and [Book III](#).
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the [Key to the charts](#).

Specific features of Psalm 77

- The strophic structure of the psalm is in a beautiful menorah pattern, which overlies the division of the text based on logotechnical considerations. It has a framework (vs. 2-4 and 17-21) with $27 + 41 = 68$ (4×17) words and a central section, vs. 5-16, made up of 78 (3×26) words, skilfully arranged in a concentric pattern. See Observation 3.
- The meaningful centre is to be found on colon level: v. 12, which is significantly highlighted by the single occurrence of the divine name. In terms of content, its meaningful centre resembles and preludes the meaningful centre of Psalm 78 (78:35).

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 2-4, 5-7 || 8-10, 11-13 || 14-16, 17-19, 20-21 (3 cantos with 7 strophes, 20 verselines and 46 cola).
- Fokkelman: similarly, but he finds 45 cola, taking vs. 6-7 as two bicolic verselines.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the framework; **d**: words in the central section.
- The numbering of the verselines is in **brown**.

| | | Total | a | b | c | d |
|---|---|-------|---|----|------|-----------|
| 1 | Heading לְמִנְצָחַ עַל־יְדֹתָיו לְאַסָּף מִזְמוֹר: | 5 | = | 5 | | |
| 2 | קוֹלִי אֶל־אֱלֹהִים וְאֶצְעָקָהּ קוֹלִי אֶל־אֱלֹהִים וְהֶאֱזִין אֵלַי: | 4 | 4 | | 4 | |
| | Total, v. 2 | 5 | | 5 | 5 | |
| 3 | בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי אֲדַנִּי דְרָשְׁתִּי יְדֵי לִילָה נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִפְּוֹגָה מֵאֲנֶה הִנָּחַם נַפְשִׁי: | 4 | 4 | | 4 | |
| | Total, v. 3 | 5 | 5 | | 5 | |
| 4 | אֲזַכֶּרָה אֱלֹהִים וְאֶהְמִידָהּ אֲשִׁיחָה וְתַתְּעִטָּה רוּחִי סִלָּה: | 3 | 3 | | 3 | |
| | Total, v. 4 | 3 | | 3 | 3 | |
| | Strophe 1 Total, v. 2-4 | 12 | = | 9 | + 3 | = 12 + 0 |
| 5 | * See below אֶחָזֶתָּ [אֶחָזֶתָּ] שְׁמֵרוֹת עֵינָי נִפְעַמְתִּי וְלֹא אֲדַבֵּר: | 3 | 3 | | | 3 |
| | Total, v. 5 | 3 | | 3 | | 3 |
| 6 | חֲשַׁבְתִּי יָמִים מִקֶּדֶם שָׁנוֹת עוֹלָמִים: | 3 | 3 | | | 3 |
| | Total, v. 6 | 2 | | 2 | | 2 |
| 7 | אֲזַכֶּרָה נְגִינָתִי בַּלִּילָה עִם־לִבִּי אֲשִׁיחָה וַיַּחַפֵּשׁ רוּחִי: | 3 | 3 | | | 3 |
| | Total, v. 7 | 2 | | 2 | | 2 |
| | Strophe 2 Total, v. 5-7 | 8 | = | 6 | + 2 | = 0 + 8 |
| | Canto I Total, v. 2-7 | 19 | = | 12 | + 7 | = 0 + 19 |
| | | 46 | = | 28 | + 18 | = 27 + 19 |

| | | | | | |
|----|--|----|----|---------------------|---|
| 8 | הַלְעוֹלָמִים יִזְנַח אֲדֹנָיִּי וְלֹא-יִסְיף לְרִצּוֹת עוֹד: | 7 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 8 | | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | Total, v. 5-8 | | 7 | = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7 | |
| 9 | הָאֶפֶס לְנִצָּח חֲסִדוֹיִּי גִּמַּר אֲמַר לְדָר וְדָר: | 8 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 9 | | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | Total, v. 2-9 | | 7 | = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7 | |
| 10 | הַשְׂכַּח חֲנוּת אֱלֹהִים אִם-קָפֵץ בְּאֵר רַחֲמָיו סֵלָה: | 9 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 10 | | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | Total, v. 8-10 | | 7 | = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7 | |
| | Strophe 3 | | 21 | = 9 + 12 = 0 + 21 | |
| | Total, v. 2-10 | | 68 | = 37 + 31 = 27 + 41 | |
| 11 | Middle word of the kernel (10-13): 25 = 12 + 1 + 12 and of the inner layer (8-15): 53 = 26 + 1 + 26 | 10 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | נֹאמַר חֲלוּתֵי הָיָא שְׁנוֹת יָמִין עֲלִיּוֹן: | | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 11 | | 6 | = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6 | |
| | Total, v. 5-11 | | 46 | = 24 + 22 = 0 + 46 | |
| | Total, v. 2-11 | | 73 | = 40 + 33 = 27 + 46 | |
| 12 | Occurs only here Middle cola: 22+2+22 Meaningful centre, highlighted by the single occurrence of the divine name | 11 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | אֲזַכּוֹר מַעַלְלֵי-יְהוָה כִּי-אֲזַכְּרָה מִקְדָּם פִּלְאָד: | | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | Total, v. 12 | | 7 | = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7 | |
| | Total, v. 8-12 | | 34 | = 15 + 19 = 0 + 34 | |
| | Numerical Total, v. 5-8 | | 26 | = 15 + 11 = 0 + 26 | |
| | Chiasmus Total, v. 9-12 | | 27 | = 12 + 15 = 0 + 27 | |
| | Total, v. 5-12 | | 53 | = 27 + 26 = 0 + 53 | |
| 13 | וְחִנִּיתִי בְּכָל-פְּעֻלָּתִי וּבְעֲלִילוֹתֶיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה: | 12 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 13 | | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | Total, v. 11-13 | | 5 | = 3 + 2 = 0 + 5 | |
| | Middle Strophe 4 | | 18 | = 9 + 9 = 0 + 18 | |
| | Kernel v. 10-13 | | 25 | = 12 + 13 = 0 + 25 | |
| | Canto II | | 39 | = 18 + 21 = 0 + 39 | |
| | Total, v. 8-13 | | 85 | = 46 + 39 = 27 + 58 | |
| 14 | אֱלֹהִים בִּקְדָּשׁ יִרְכָּבֶנּוּ מִי-אֵל גָּדוֹל בְּאֱלֹהִים: | 13 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 14 | | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | Total, v. 12-15 | | 7 | = 3 + 4 = 0 + 7 | |
| 15 | אֵתָהּ הָאֵל עֲשֵׂה פִלְאָה הוֹדַעְתָּ בְּעַמִּים עֲזָרָה: | 14 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | Total, v. 15 | | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 12-15 | | 7 | = 4 + 3 = 0 + 7 | |
| | Inner Layer v. 8-15 | | 26 | = 13 + 13 = 0 + 26 | |
| | Total, v. 16 | | 53 | = 25 + 28 = 0 + 53 | |
| 16 | גִּאֲלָתָּ בְּזִרְוֹעַ עֲמֻדָּה בְּגִי-יַעֲקֹב וְיִוְסַף סֵלָה: | 15 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 16 | | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | Total, v. 14-16 | | 6 | = 3 + 3 = 0 + 6 | |
| | Strophe 5 | | 20 | = 10 + 10 = 0 + 20 | |
| | Outer Layer v. 5-16 | | 78 | = 40 + 38 = 0 + 78 | |

| | | | | | | |
|----|-----------|---------------------------------|-----|-----------|-----------|--|
| 17 | | רֹאשׁוֹ מִיָּם אֱלֹהִים 16 | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | רֹאשׁוֹ מִיָּם יְחִילוֹ | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | אֶף יִרְגְּזוּ תַּהֲמוֹת: | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | Total, v. 17 | 9 | = 6 + 3 | = 9 + 0 | |
| 18 | | זִרְמוּ מִיָּם עֲבוֹת 17 | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | קוֹל נִתְּנוּ שְׁחָקִים | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | אֶף־חֲצִצִּידָה יִתְהַלְכוּ: | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | Total, v. 18 | 9 | = 6 + 3 | = 9 + 0 | |
| 19 | | קוֹל רַעֲמָךְ בְּגִלְגֹּל 18 | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | הָאִירוּ בְּרָקִים תִּבְלֹ | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | רִגְזָה וַתִּרְעַשׂ הָאָרֶץ: | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | Total, v. 19 | 9 | = 6 + 3 | = 9 + 0 | |
| | Strophe 6 | Total, v. 17-19 | 27 | = 18 + 9 | = 27 + 0 | |
| | | Total, v. 12-19 | 59 | = 34 + 25 | = 59 + 0 | |
| 20 | | בָּיִם יִרְפָּךְ 19 | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| | | וַשְׁבִּילֶךָ בְּמִיָּם רַבִּים | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | וַעֲקֹבוֹתֶיךָ לֹא נִדְעוּ: | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | Total, v. 20 | 8 | = 5 + 3 | = 8 + 0 | |
| 21 | Coda | נַחֲתִיתָ כִּצְאוֹן עֲמֹדָה 20 | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | בִּיד־מִשְׁחָה וְאַהֲרֹן: | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| | | Total, v. 21 | 6 | = 3 + 3 | = 6 + 0 | |
| | Strophe 7 | Total, v. 20-21 | 14 | = 8 + 6 | = 14 + 0 | |
| | | Total, v. 17-21 | 41 | = 26 + 15 | = 41 + 0 | |
| | Canto III | Total, v. 14-21 | 61 | = 36 + 25 | = 61 + 0 | |
| | | Total, v. 5-21 | 119 | = 66 + 53 | = 41 + 78 | |
| | | Total, v. 2-21 | 146 | = 82 + 64 | = 68 + 78 | |
| | | With the heading, 1-21 | 151 | = 87 + 64 | | |
| | | And with סֵלָה (3x), 1-21 | 154 | = 87 + 67 | | |

* In v. 5a I read the passive participle fem. plur. אֶחְזוֹת, instead of the 2nd person perfect אֶחְזִית, with M. Dahood (Psalms II, 227), but I maintain the meaning 'eyelids' for שְׁמֵרוֹת עֵינַי, and translate the colon "My eyelids are dilated".

Observations

1. In terms of the 146 words of the poem, the arithmetic centre falls between vs. 11 and 12 (146 = 73 + 73). There is no meaningful centre on word level, but in terms of the 46 cola, v. 12 is an excellent candidate: it contains the **middle 2 cola** (22 + 2 + 22), which fall within the **middle strophe**, vs. 11-13 (see Observation 2):

אֶזְכּוֹר מַעֲלֵלֶיךָ ^ כִּי־אֶזְכְּרָה מַקְדָּם פְּלֹאֶךָ:

I will call to mind the deeds of YH // I will remember your wonders of old!

The divine name - the only occurrence in the whole poem - highlights the meaningful centre in a special way. Compare Psalm 74:18, where the single divine name highlights the meaningful centre of Canto II.

2. From a thematic perspective, the psalm divides into **7** strophes in a menorah pattern:

1. vs. 2-4 Description of the context of the prayer: anguish
2. vs. 5-7 I consider the days of old during the night
3. vs. 8-10 Has God's love failed utterly?
4. vs. 11-13 **However, I remember his wonderful deeds of old**
5. vs. 14-16 Incomparable God, you are unrivalled in powerful deeds
6. vs. 17-19 The powers in nature writhe in anguish before you
7. vs. 20-21 Your ways are mysterious; you shepherded your people.

The pivotal position of the middle strophe is underscored by the fact that it coincides with the 6 middle cola (46 cola = 20 + 6 + 20).

By referring to God's wondrous deeds of old, the speaker, faced with the frightening possibility that God's love and power might prove to be ineffectual, refutes the idea that the right hand of the Most High has changed. The middle strophe, constituting the heart of the poetic framework, may therefore be regarded as the meaningful centre on strophic level. Let us now examine the numerical features of the psalm.

3. My logotechnical analysis brought to light the following amazing numerical structure: Psalm 77 consists of a **78-word** (3 x **26**) **central section**, vs. 5-16, surrounded by a **68-word** (4 x **17**) **framework**, vs. 2-4 with 27 words and vs. 17-21 with 41 words. For a strikingly similar feature, compare [Psalm 80](#), where the **52-word** (2 x **26**) central section is surrounded by a **78-word** (3 x **26**) prayer (49 + 29 = **78** words).

The key-word עֲלִיּוֹן, 'Most High', is positioned in v. 11 at the centre of the 25-word central core of the psalm, vs. 10-13, which falls within a larger section, vs. 8-15 in such a way that עֲלִיּוֹן is placed with mathematic precision at the centre of both:

vs. 10-13 **Kernel**, with עֲלִיּוֹן, 'Most High', at its centre (25 = 12 + **1** + 12)

vs. 8-15 **Inner Layer**, with עֲלִיּוֹן, 'Most High', at its centre (53 = **26** + **1** + **26**).

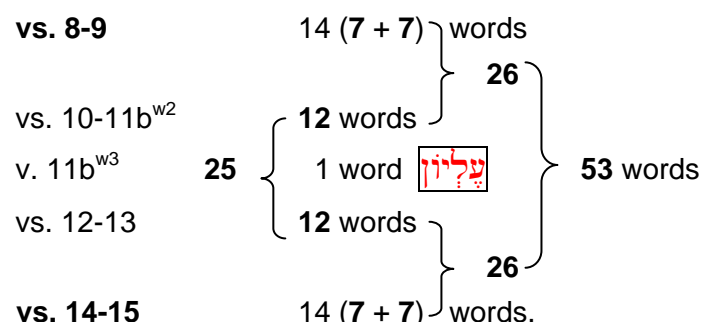
The Inner Layer falls within the larger Outer Layer, vs. 5-16, which is surrounded by a 68-word (4 x 17) framework, vs. 2-4 with 27 words and vs. 17-21 with 41 words:

vs. 2-4 **Introduction**, made up of 27 words, delimited by *selah*

vs. 5-16 **Outer Layer**, made up of **78** (3 x **26**) words, demarcated by *selahs*.

vs. 17-21 **Conclusion**, made up of 41 words (27 + 41 = **68**).

Here is the symmetric numerical structure of the Inner Layer:



The concentric pattern 7 + 7 + 12 + **1** + 12 + 7 + 7 = **26** + **1** + **26** is reminiscent of the overall structure of [Psalm 1](#) (26 + 7 + **1** + 7 + 26).

4. The pivotal word **עֲלִיּוֹן** is undoubtedly a keyword of paramount importance, being the most appropriate title of the Supreme God, whose exalted status, based on his incomparable power and mighty deeds, is the leading idea of the psalm.

The 53-word heart of the poem deals with the exalted status of the Most High, the Supreme God, incomparable and unrivalled among the gods, because of his unchanging steadfast love, demonstrated by his unparalleled saving deeds.

In terms of content, Psalm 77 is not only a continuation of Psalm 76, it also preludes Psalm 78, which deals with YHWH's glorious deeds in the history of the Israelites despite their disobedience and ingratitude. Note also the evident correspondence between the meaningful centres of the two psalms (77:12 and [78:35](#))!

5. Note that **vs. 17-20** stand apart, being *tricola* in contrast to the *bicola* in vs. 8-16. The last verseline, **v. 21**, however, is a *bicolon*, clearly showing that it is a coda. It is most interesting to note that the explicit reference to the *shepherding* by Moses and Aaron preludes the *shepherding* by David at the end of Psalm 78 (vs. 70-72).
6. Despite the meticulously composed numerical structure of the central section, there are still a considerable number of divine name numbers woven into the text:

| | |
|-----------|---|
| vs. 5-8 | 26 words, with 15 (YH) before, and 11 (HW) after atnach |
| vs. 2-9 | 34 (2 x 17) words before atnach |
| vs. 2-10 | 68 (4 x 17) words in total |
| vs. 2-13 | 85 (5 x 17) words in total |
| vs. 8-12 | 34 (2 x 17) words in total, with 15 before, and 19 after atnach* |
| vs. 5-12 | 26 words after atnach |
| vs. 2-13 | 85 (5 x 17) words in total |
| vs. 12-15 | 26 words in total |
| vs. 5-16 | 78 (3 x 26) words in total |
| vs. 12-19 | 34 (2 x 17) words before atnach |
| vs. 17-21 | 26 words before atnach |
| vs. 5-21 | 119 (7 x 17) words in total. |

Within Canto II (vs. 8-13) a certain section of the text vs. 8-12 is structured according to the intriguing formula **34 = 15 + 19**, which also occurs in Pss. 81:9-12, 95:8-11, 105:40-44, 106:23-27, 107:23-26+40, Deut. 1:34-40 and Deut. 7:5-6 and 25-26, in all cases in connection with Israel's apostasy and the loss of the land. See Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 81](#) and especially Observation 3 in that of [Psalm 95](#).

7. As in Psalms 73, 74, 75, and 76, the divine name occurs only once, in this case in its shortest form **יְיָ** (v. 12a). In all five psalms the single occurrence of the Name has a highlighting function. In Psalms 74 and 77 it even highlights the meaningful centre. The designation **אֱלֹהִים** occurs 6x, and **אֵל** 3x. The title **עֲלִיּוֹן** occurs only in v. 11b. Being a keyword of paramount importance, it preludes the **עֲלִיּוֹן** in Psalm 78, especially in v. 35a, which represents the middle occurrence of the **7** instances of this keyword in the **11** Asaphite psalms! See Observation 1 in my Analysis of [Psalm 78](#).

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